

# Australian Garden

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## HISTORY

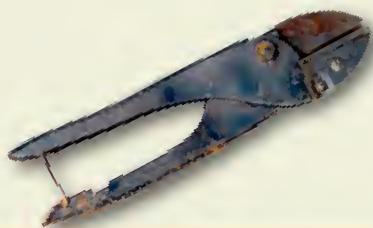


Sydney Gardens turn 200

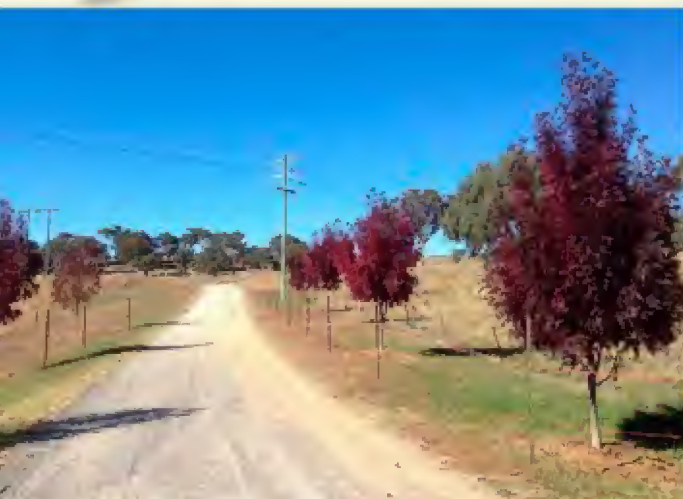
Australian ornamental  
palms

Unofficial gardening





# Snippets



Photos: Bernadette Hince

## The claret ash – a dinky-di exotic

Just over a hundred years ago an interesting sapling came to the notice of a South Australian horticulturist. Some details of the cultivar's early life are vague, but we know that in about 1910 native plant enthusiast Tullie Wollaston, a land developer and opal dealer, bought a colourful seedling at Sewell's Nursery at Aldgate in the Adelaide Hills. Ashes with good autumn tones were not astonishing – trees with this characteristic were already known from China, Japan and North America, but the South Australian tree was particularly eye-catching.

Wollaston's gardener Mr J Gates propagated the ash, grafted it on to *Fraxinus ornus* and budded it on to *F. excelsior* at Wollaston's property Raywood at Bridgewater, a garden which featured both exotic and native trees and shrubs.

In the early and mid-20th century in Australia, before winemakers became more specific about the grape varieties they used for their wines (and before other parts of the world began to hold their own regional names more closely), names like 'burgundy' and 'claret' were common. So the shapely deciduous tree *Fraxinus oxycarpa* 'Raywood', with its wine-red to plum-purple autumn leaves, became known as the 'claret ash'. In about 1925, Wollaston set up Ray Nursery, from which most of the early material of the claret ash was distributed. The nursery closed in the 1940s, but the plant is still travelling widely.

It became a popular landscape tree in southern Australia. In his 1934 book *Flowering trees and shrubs* Harold Sargeant ('Anthos') of the Melbourne *Herald* wrote that the 'purple or claret Ash [is] a beautiful specimen when successfully grown'. This was about the time that the common name is first recorded.

*The Land* wrote on 22 April 1949 that Messrs Anderson and Co were displaying the claret ash at the Royal Show in Sydney. 'How I wish I had a pen adequate to do justice to the beauties of this tree with its finely shaped leaves of a deep rich tone that is neither red nor yet maroon', wrote the somewhat purple-fisted reporter.

Claret ashes have been used in suburban plantings, and as windbreaks on farms and in public plantings, such as the avenue of honour in Byaduk, western Victoria. This was planted in 1918, using 40 silky oaks to commemorate those who served in World War I. In 1963 the avenue was replanted with claret ashes. Like some other members of the olive family, the claret ash has become naturalised in parts of southeastern and possibly also southwestern Australia, and is now seen as a weed in some places.

Because its parent stock originated elsewhere, you won't find the claret ash in many books about Australian plants. But with its history, it's as Australian as a blue heeler.

Sources: *Australian dictionary of biography*, Brian Morley (1976) *Journal of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens* 1: 35–36, Memorials Australia website, National Library of Australia Trove website, *Oxford companion to Australian gardens*.

The Snipper thanks Dr Suzanne Eggins for her help.

**Cover:** Beverly Allen, *Dichorisandra thyrsiflora*. From *The Florilegium: the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney celebrating 200 years* (2016) Florilegium Society at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, Hunters Hill, pp 92–93. (For more on the Florilegium, see this issue pp 28–30.)

There are at least 35 species of *Dichorisandra*, but the Brazilian plant *D. thyrsiflora* is the only one that is much grown. Though listed in William Macarthur's *Catalogue of plants cultivated at Camden Park, New South Wales, 1857*, it was not introduced to the Sydney Botanic Garden until later.



# Editorial

Bernadette Hince



As I write, it is only a few days before the winter solstice. Autumn leaves are filling the street's wet gutters and blowing around in the cold of a grey Canberra afternoon.

This issue features public parks and botanic gardens, most notably in Sydney, where the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney are marking 200 years since their beginnings.

With the historical

evidence supplied by correspondence records from this institution, Jodi Frawley shows the role of botanic gardens in shifting plants and other botanical specimens around the globe. Colleen Morris tells us about the exhibition she has curated, 'Florilegium, Sydney's Painted Garden' for the exciting new florilegium, and Max Bourke reviews the beautiful book which has resulted.

In 1866 Sydney Common became Moore Park. Anne-Maree Whitaker celebrates this anniversary with a survey of City of Sydney parks, and our attitudes to them.

Don Beer writes about Canberra's younger and very different Australian National Botanic Gardens. With the recent revival of interest in Australian palm horticulture, John Dowe brings us the heady days of their rising popularity during the mid to late 19th century. Greg Keighery draws Western Australia's mountain bells to our notice – the darwinias of the Stirling Range, with their considerable horticultural potential.

Trevor Pitkin tells the story of his 'unofficial gardening' in a Melbourne suburb. How many of us have had impulses to garden in this way? The impulse seems strongest (at least in my own case) when looking from a train window at the neglected remnants of what must once have been carefully tended station gardens. In the early 1990s, as Chris Betteridge reminds us in the RAILWAY GARDENS entry of the *Oxford companion to Australian gardens*, railways tried to encourage a community interest in such gardens, through the 'Life, be in it' health campaign. Pitkin's own endeavour began as a solo effort, but has become something with communal rewards (and the odd theft).

The railway verge garden he has created would wither or disappear if he ceased to tend it, he says. As members of a garden history society we, like Pitkin, are probably all conscious that the same applies to any gardens, whether these are anonymously domestic and private, or extremely well known and public.

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Anne-Maree Whitaker

# City of Sydney parks

The central avenue of figs in Hyde Park, regrown since the park was completely dug up in the 1920s to build the city circle underground railway.

Photo: JWC Adam, Wikimedia Commons

This year sees the bicentenary of Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens and the sesquicentenary of nearby Moore Park. Today the City of Sydney covers 26.15 square kilometres of central Sydney and has a resident population of over 198,000.

The settlement of Sydney was 22 years old when its first recreation ground was proclaimed in 1810, in an area hitherto called 'The Common', 'Exercising Ground', 'Cricket Ground' or 'Racecourse'. Governor Lachlan Macquarie named it Hyde Park after the one in central London, and it is still one of Sydney's premier parks.

The next major open space reserved in Sydney was the Botanical Garden (now Royal Botanic Gardens) established in 1816. The Gardens have always had a dual role as a botanical and scientific institution as well as a place of public recreation. The first Colonial Botanist was Charles Frazer (or Fraser), a private in the 56th Regiment who arrived in Sydney in 1816 and was soon relieved of his military duties and set to plant collecting and cultivation.

## Centennial Park's origins

Having declared the original common a park, Governor Macquarie dedicated a second common of 1000 acres in 1811. The land was a mixture

of sandhills and swamps, and took in all the area of modern Centennial Park and Moore Park, including the entertainment precinct and adjacent sports grounds.

By the 1860s the rise of organised public recreation created a demand for more public space. In 1866 Sydney Common was gazetted as a public park under the control of Sydney Municipal Council, and the following year work began on levelling the sand dunes and planting stabilising vegetation. At the same time the area was renamed Moore Park to honour Charles Moore, who served as Lord Mayor of Sydney from 1867 to 1869. Over the next 30 years major facilities were built there: Sydney Cricket Ground in the 1870s, the Showground and Zoological Gardens in the 1880s, and the Sports Ground in the 1900s.

In the 1870s pressure grew from urban reformers and suburban residents for the government to provide parks and recreation areas. This new attitude was reflected in Sir Henry Parkes's *Land for Public Purposes Acquisition Act* of 1880, which allocated £200,000 to buy land for local parks across the state. Such was the demand that the whole amount was spent within two years, but over the next decade large tracts of new land were created by reclamation at Rushcutters Bay, Blackwattle Bay and Rozelle Bay. In addition new municipalities such as Alexandria, Erskineville, Redfern and Waterloo created their own parks,



often on land which had been rejected for private development due to its marshy or sandy soil.

The influence of the Directors of the Sydney Botanic Gardens on the layout, form and content of parks was extensive throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. A second Charles Moore (not the Lord Mayor) was Director from 1848 to 1896. He advised custodians of parks throughout Sydney and was responsible for the perimeter plantings of native figs which still dominate many of Sydney's parks. His successor Joseph Maiden (Director 1896–1924) advocated the use of palms to emphasise Sydney's subtropical climate, and his plantings are still evident in Macquarie Street, Centennial Park and in suburbs such as Randwick, Balmain and Haberfield.

## 20th century developments

The early years of the 20th century saw a turning point in attitudes to parks. Maiden wrote an article on 'The parks of Sydney' in 1902 which he followed up in other forums such as the 1909 Royal Commission on the Improvement of Sydney and Suburbs. His research revealed that

while the metropolitan area overall might have adequate open space, the most heavily populated suburbs such as Darlington and Newtown had virtually none.

Simultaneously the rise of town planning emphasised the need for statutory provision of parkland and green belts. Public parks and open spaces contributed not just to the beauty of the city, but to the health of its inhabitants. Sir John Sulman's 1890 lecture 'The laying out of towns' marked the beginning of town planning in Australia, and he was an influential advocate for open space and garden suburbs over the next 40 years. Pressure by men such as Maiden and Sulman coincided with the Sydney City Council taking over control of Hyde, Cook and Phillip Parks in 1905 and establishing its City Parks Branch.

Adopting its new responsibility with gusto, Council donated £300 to the NSW Band Association for playing 60 performances in city parks during summer evenings. In Hyde Park and Prince Alfred Park attendances were estimated at 8000 to 10,000 and the Town Clerk described the program as an example of 'higher municipalism'.

Wynyard Park in 1906, just before the fences were removed to allow public access to this previously private open space.

Photo: City of Sydney Archives, 036137



The introduction of electric lighting after 1906 meant that parks could be lit at night, improving access and safety. In the first decade of the 20th century, following the trend in the USA, railing fences around parks were also removed to emphasise the fact that the parks were public, rather than private, property.

## Public support for the parks

Inevitably the provision of public parks continued to fall behind the demands of activists such as the Parks Preservation Society (founded in 1914). Its successor, the Parks and Playgrounds Movement, was founded in 1930 and two years later published the *Basic Report*, which declared that ten per cent of a city's area should be devoted to recreational space, then determined that most suburbs in Sydney fell far short. The Parks and Playground Movement was heavily influenced by social Darwinism, and declared that 'clean sport is not merely preventive of crime; it is undoubtedly one of the most powerful positive character-moulding influences in operation in the world today'.

The inadequate provision of parks in Sydney was admitted by City Engineer Arnold Garnsey in 1948, when he stated that 'In our own City of Sydney most of its present parks and open spaces such as Hyde Park, Moore Park, the Domain, which constitute 80 per cent of the park system, were left as open spaces prior to the year 1878, and during the last 50 years only 12 acres have been added to the park system of which 9 acres being residues from resumptions in connection with the Harbour Bridge'.

After World War II a major report on the city's parks was prepared by Mr Garnsey and Alderman Ernest Marks, Vice-Chairman of the Health and Recreations committee. Their report to the Council in 1946 recommended a program of increasing and improving the city's parks, open spaces, children's playgrounds and street tree planting. Admitting that 'the scheme now submitted appears ambitious and of a magnitude beyond the financial resources of the Council', they nevertheless urged its adoption as a 'Master Plan to prevent haphazard development and with a consummation period of 30 years'. The report was adopted and led to the creation of Council's first Department of Parks and Recreations in 1948.

1948 also saw the expansion of the City Council's boundaries to take in the former municipalities of Alexandria, Darlingtown, Erskineville, Glebe, Newtown, Paddington,

Redfern and Waterloo, the very areas which had the lowest open space and highest population density. Although the Marks-Garnsey report proposed large-scale parks in areas with little open space, few of these plans came to fruition. More typical of the period were 'pocket parks' occupying one or two terrace house sites which were acquired by resumption. During the 1950s and 1960s aldermen of the enlarged city scoured their wards for vacant sites which could be turned into new parks.

## New parks today

Despite urban consolidation and population growth, the late 20th and early 21st centuries saw the creation of a number of significant new parks in the inner city. The largest at 40 hectares was Sydney Park on a former brickworks and rubbish tip site in Alexandria. Redevelopment created green spaces such as Jessie Street Gardens at Circular Quay, Harmony Park in Surry Hills, Edmund Resch Park in Redfern and Joynton Park in Zetland. Rehabilitation of former industrial harbourside land brought about Pymont Point Park and Glebe Foreshore Parklands. The colonnaded former Paddington Reservoir was turned into an underground park, which won the Australian Award for Urban Design in 2009.

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**Dr Anne-Maree Whitaker** is an independent historian and member of the Australian Garden History Society. Her 'Sydney parks' webpages and signboards won a National Trust Heritage Award for 2010 for Interpretation and Presentation.





Belmore Park and Central Railway in 1926 after the construction of the new city circle rail line.

Photo: City of Sydney Archives, 030773



Hyde Park North after completion of the underground railway, 1930.

Photo: City of Sydney Archives, NSCA CRS 43 (1930) *Vade Mecum*, p182



Barcom Avenue Reserve, Darlinghurst, under construction in the 1930s, looking up West Street towards Oxford Street.

Photo: City of Sydney Archives, 029050



Paddington Reservoir Gardens reveals the 19th century reservoir structures as the setting for a sunken garden, tree-fern garden, and ponds.

Photo: Josef Nalevansky for City of Sydney





J. H. Maiden, Esq.  
 Botanic Gardens Sydney 27th Dec 6  
 Dear Sir  
 By this mail I send a package containing  
 a sample of wattle, the seed of which came from  
 near a West Australian: please to identify it  
 for me: the time of flowering appears unusual.  
 A sample of Bathurst Burr, is it a freak or  
 something new?  
 Yours faithfully  
 H. L. White

Jodi Frawley

## The deep roots of reciprocity at the Botanic Gardens, Sydney

Over the course of the 19th century, the Botanic Gardens, Sydney (now the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney) grew from a garden attached to the Governor's demesne to a globally significant scientific institution. From the time of its enclosure in 1816, plants, plant material and plant information were gathered in the garden, herbarium, library, museum and nurseries on the Farm Cove site.

Over its first hundred years, Gardens staff built an impressive array of collections of both animate and inanimate matter. They built these collections by actively corresponding with people and institutions all over the world. This corresponding went on with interested parties on local, colonial, imperial and international scales, as well as with other settler colonies. Much of

this correspondence ignored political boundaries and instead worked from the desire to harness global botanical knowledge to local ideas about how plants might be useful. Such deft use of correspondence enhanced the capacity of the institution to support a vast array of settlement issues, from testing grasses for pastoralism to managing invasive species and cultivating trees for urban aesthetics.

Corresponding was an infrastructure in the same way as the railway and shipping complex; all conveyed material culture around the globe. In terms of botanical exchange, this network carried books, letters, reports, journal articles, plants, samples, specimens and illustrations that were all references to the botanical worlds both within and outside of Australia. For example, in the annual report for 1899, Gardens staff recorded that George Bolton of Crystal Creek in northern

Gardens director Joseph Maiden corresponded with pastoralist Henry L. White from Belltrees in New South Wales, sending specimens from Cardwell and information about shade trees while requesting items in return. White also sent Maiden Western Australian wattles for identification, and samples of the weed Bathurst Burr.

Letterbooks held at Belltrees, Scone



The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney exchanged plants such as the velvety prickly pear, *Opuntia tomentosa*, from Joseph Maiden's experimental work undertaken in Scone. In 1901 Maiden employed Margaret Flockton (1861–1953) as the first botanical illustrator at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney. She held the position for 27 years.

Margaret Flockton coloured lithograph, courtesy of Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney



New South Wales was sent the seeds of *Trifolia Johnsoni*. Meanwhile, Botanic Gardens, Sydney accepted the ripe fruits of *Aegle marmelos* (Bengal quince) from *Anthelme Thozet* of Rockhampton, and Gardens staff dispatched 60 packets of New South Wales seeds to the Barbados Imperial Department of Agriculture. By the time Joseph Maiden completed his directorship in 1924, between 5000 and 8000 correspondence items were sent out each year and the same number received by the institution.

The Botanic Gardens, Sydney sent almost nothing that didn't also carry the expectation

of returned plants, plant material and plant information. Of this network, Charles Moore (director 1848–96) reported to the Select Committee inquiring into the management of the Sydney Botanic Gardens in 1855:

*The system is this – if I wish to enter an arrangement for the exchange of plants with any place – as, for instance, Hamburg – I send a case of such plants as I think may be valuable for that place.*



## After 1900

By the end of the century, this procedure had become much more than the exchanges between botanic gardens directors. Gardens staff corresponded with other state-based institutions, interested commercial enterprises and passionate individuals. In a letter to Joseph Maiden in 1900, Mr Chas Walter of Melbourne sent specimens and a note on a eucalypt (*Eucalyptus kruseana*), along with *Aphelias*, deemed rare in New South Wales. In return, botanical assistant Ernst Betche sent a small packet of plant material, probably seeds, lamenting the fact that he could not be more generous, since the collecting season was just beginning. Betche encouraged his correspondent's collecting ventures by the volume and quality of his gifts.

The annual reports also record the international connections, such as South African government botanist Professor Peter MacOwan of Cape Town, who sent many items to Sydney in exchange for plants and material on *Acacia* species, among other objects. Each time one of these items went into the mail, the potential for exchange was also sent with it. Some of these parcels went to individuals, others to long-time correspondents of the institution.

One ready-made network by which Gardens' staff sent and received material was the extensive one of botanic gardens worldwide. Given Australia's alignment with Britain, botanic gardens of the British Empire were important but this correspondence went well beyond these boundaries. Botanic gardens were found in the French, German and Dutch colonies, as well as in countries not necessarily aligned with any particular empire such as Russia and the United States of America. Gardens staff took no consideration of imperial allegiances when they sent material with the expectation of returned goods. For example, 33 packets of seeds were sent to the Director of the Botanic Gardens of the Imperial University, St Petersburg, Russia; 40 packets to the Kolonial Museum, Haarlem, Holland; 55 packets to the Botanic Gardens au Parc de la Tête d'Or, Lyon, France; 145 packets to the Regius Keeper, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh and 32 packets to the Botanic Gardens at Utrecht. Seeds and plants went to Rome, Argentina, New York, Hong Kong and Java, through a process that worked through ad hoc botanical connections rather than recognition of political boundaries.

The information gathered through these networks of reciprocity was, in turn, applied to local problems. In the 1911 annual report, Maiden wrote:

*The following brief statement may give some idea of the miscellaneous subjects dealt with by correspondence during the year 1910:- Australian edible nuts; Poison Ivy (Rhus radicans) and remedies for the skin-irritation caused by it; Native flowers, plants, and seeds suitable for Britain, Europe, and the United States; Value of grasses for fodder; Plants poisonous to stock.*

A further 62 topics made it into Maiden's list out of the 7915 registered items from that year. Within the correspondence lists published in annual reports, he makes no distinction between people and institutions seeking their botanical expertise. The Botanic Gardens, Sydney was very proud that the collections that they maintained and developed could be utilised to answer both the simplest of questions for locals, and theoretical questions of international scientific importance.

The Queensland prickly pear, *Opuntia* sp., originally from Argentina, was the main invasive species that occupied up to 60 million acres of arable Australian land by 1910. The Botanic Gardens, Sydney led the earliest research into its eradication, partly by corresponding with international institutions.

Margaret Flockton coloured lithograph, courtesy of Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney





## The trade increases

Once activated, the networks of reciprocity saw publications, specimens and seeds flow into the Botanic Gardens, Sydney. So voluminous was this trade that by the beginning of the 20th century, staff were no longer in a position to write personal notes of thanks and acknowledgement to all the generous correspondents. They solved this problem with the creation of form letters, with copies pressed into letter books.

The Botanic Gardens, Sydney staff sent form letters to acknowledge the receipt of items. They show the vast range of places from which material was received. It is worth noting that these generic letters were not for any one particular section of the collection. There was no

expectation that material received would only be specimens or printed matter or seeds or living plants. Collecting was considered in its broader sense, that is, accumulating plants, plant material and plant information. The extent of material that was sent and acknowledged in this way was breathtaking.

The Botanic Gardens, Sydney thanked the government geologist of South Australia for the maps sent. They were grateful for the forestry reports from Simla, India and Rangoon, Burma. They acknowledged the *Bulletin of the Agricultural Experiment Station of Idaho* and 11 packets of seeds from the director of the Botanic Gardens, Cape Town. Thanks were also sent out for French reports, German bulletins, Russian seeds and American publications. The correspondence demonstrates not only the formation of interpersonal relations of Gardens' staff but also the very literal flows of the physical matter that made the collections transnational.

The accumulating plants, plant material and plant information became the resources that the institution translated into botanical knowledge, as it worked on matters of local, national and international importance. Such was the significance of these collections, accumulated through networks of reciprocity, that director George Darnell-Smith saved the herbarium and library from rationalisations as the Great Depression bit in 1929.

The museum and the experimental nursery were not so lucky, the first eventually being disbanded in the 1940s, the second sold for land value at Campbelltown. Nevertheless, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney continue to be an internationally significant botanical institution. In large part, they are able to do so because of the extent of collections received over the 19th century. The work of today's scientists ensures that the plants, plant material and plant information held in Sydney continue to circulate in these same networks of reciprocity.

Form letters like this reveal the variety of materials received. This one acknowledges the receipt by the Botanic Gardens, Sydney in September 1900 of an 1899–1900 annual report from the Government Botanic Gardens in Ootacamund, India.

New South Wales State Records: Letterbooks of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney



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John Leslie Dowe

## Ornamental palms in 19th century Australia

From 1860 to 1880 there was a rapid increase in the number of species of ornamental palms cultivated in Australia, mostly as a result of the construction of glasshouses and the increased rates of exchanges and acquisitions associated with specialised botanic garden collections.

Australian horticulture during the mid-1800s was an adaption of traditional British and European methods and attitudes, albeit in an antipodean context. Plant collecting and horticulture had become 'serious' hobbies, and all levels of society were engaged in activities such as home gardening, plant collecting and floral arts.<sup>1</sup> Horticultural societies and garden clubs were flourishing.<sup>2</sup> One of the predominant specialised activities of the era was collecting and growing ferns, then termed 'pteridomania'.<sup>3</sup> The growing

of ferns took many forms, from expansive outdoor ferneries to enclosed plant houses and to the smallest of indoor terrariums.

Through the initial association of palms as companion plants to ferns, tender palms became a singular group of collectable plants that could be grown with relative ease. Correspondingly, botanic gardens began to feature palm collections as a source of institutional prestige and civic pride, based on the perception of the 'nobility' and rarity of many species. This was mostly stimulated by the introduction of heated glasshouses which allowed a much greater range of tropical plants to be grown in the temperate climates of southern Australia.

Palms did not feature significantly in early horticulture in the Australian colonies, where gardening was mainly confined to the provision of food, forage and other useful plants, and

'Oilette' coloured postcard view of the fountain, Brisbane Botanic Garden ca. 1895, by Albert Henry Fullwood.

State Library of Queensland  
image 6418-0001-0006





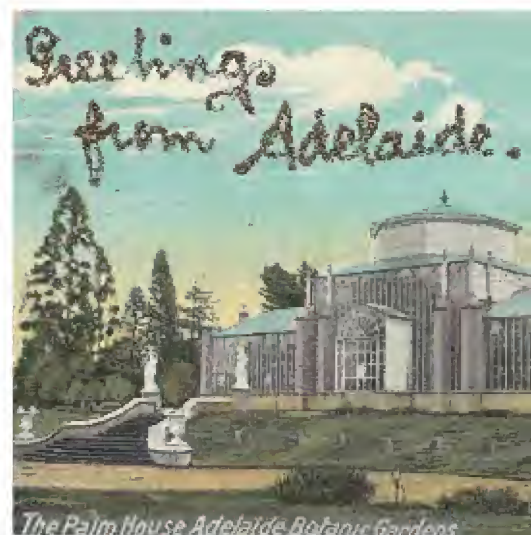
Above: 'The Palm House, Melbourne Botanic Gardens'. Wood engraving, *Illustrated Australian News* 27 July 1881.

Courtesy State Library of Victoria

Middle, top: Palm House of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens, postcard ca. 1890. Private collection

Middle, bottom: Adelaide Botanic Gardens Palm House, ca. 1892.

Photo: Charles Rudd. Courtesy State Library of Victoria



ornamental plants were subsidiary to those necessary for existence. The date palm was reported on during the 1820s–1830s as a potential food plant,<sup>4</sup> and in the 1840s the demise of the cabbage palm (*Livistona australis*) populations around Sydney for the mere production of hats was a matter of concern.<sup>5</sup> The first known list of palms cultivated in Australia was compiled in 1828 by Charles Frazer (or Fraser), Superintendent of the Sydney Botanic Gardens and Colonial Botanist 1816–31. He listed eight palm species.<sup>6</sup>

## Botanic gardens and the cultivation of palms

With the expansion of existing botanic gardens such as those in Sydney, established in 1816, and Melbourne in 1846, and the founding of new gardens in Adelaide and Brisbane, both in 1855, the 1860s and 1870s witnessed a rapid increase in the number of palms being grown in Australian botanical gardens. There was a corresponding awakening of public awareness,

and *The Australasian* newspaper (26 September 1868, p 26) noted that 'palms may soon become as plentiful as ferns in this country'. Acquisitive curators such as Charles Moore in Sydney, Baron Ferdinand von Mueller and William Guilfoyle in Melbourne, Richard Schomburgk in Adelaide and Walter Hill and Frederic Manson Bailey in Brisbane instigated inter-garden exchange programs between their own institutions and with international gardens, including those in tropical areas.<sup>7</sup>

Outdoor gardens featuring palms were created with the aspiration of adding prestige to the respective gardens. In Sydney the 'Palm Grove' was established in 1862,<sup>8</sup> and that in Melbourne was titled on maps of 1864 as the 'Collection of Hardy Palms'.<sup>9</sup> Two palm gardens were established in the Brisbane Botanic Garden, as noted in Walter Hill's report of 1870, with one described as 'the compartment of ground set apart for them near the Aviary' and the other as 'adjacent to the residence of the Director'.<sup>10</sup> The 'Palm Garden' was established in Adelaide





in 1870. Glasshouses suitable for tropical palms were built in Melbourne in 1858 (replaced in 1880),<sup>11</sup> in Sydney in 1876 and in Adelaide in 1877.<sup>12</sup> In Brisbane the climate was amenable enough for the use of unheated shadehouses and outdoor cultivation.<sup>13</sup>

## Expansion from the 1880s

Accession records, censuses and catalogues associated with Australian botanic gardens indicate that the hardier Australasian palms such as *Livistona australis*, *Archontophoenix cunninghamiana* and *Rhopalostylis sapida* were among the earliest to be grown, as were exotic palms that could tolerate temperate climates and drier conditions, including *Chamaerops humilis*, *Jubaea chilensis*, *Livistona chinensis* and *Rhaphis*, *Sabal* and *Phoenix* species. However, with the introduction of heated glasshouses, the number of tender tropical palms increased significantly. By the late 1860s, both Sydney and Melbourne gardens listed more than 40 species.<sup>14</sup> Following the construction of the Adelaide Botanic Gardens

heated glasshouse in 1877, the palm species increased from 23 in 1871 to 136 in 1878, 159 in 1884 and 183 in 1888.<sup>15</sup> By 1875, Brisbane Botanic Gardens listed 115 species,<sup>16</sup> and by the 1890s Melbourne listed 100 species and Sydney 120 species.<sup>17</sup> These collections included many potted specimens kept in heated or warm glasshouses.

## The decline of palm cultivation

By the 1890s, the numbers of palms entering botanic garden collections began to decrease. Persistence and longevity in cultivation appear to have been difficult to achieve for the tender tropical species. Many were not subsequently recorded in later censuses and are not present in extant collections. The early to mid-decades of the 1900s saw a waning in the public appreciation of palms. It was not until the 1980 and 1990s that a revival in interest occurred, with the establishment of dedicated palm societies and specialised botanic gardens and collections, and palms again became a significant feature in Australian horticulture.

'Grotto, Palm House', ca. 1877, Adelaide Botanic Garden.

Photo: Samuel White Sweet, courtesy National Library of Australia



## Footnotes

- 1 Judith Baskin and Trisha Dixon (1996) *Australia's timeless gardens*. National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- 2 Marjorie Porter (1987) *A seed is planted: a history of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria, 1848-2014*. Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria, Bacchus Marsh, 2014; Brian Hearne, *The Royal Horticultural Society of New South Wales 125 years anniversary 1862-1987*, Royal Horticultural Society of NSW, Sydney.
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Left: Sydney Botanic Gardens, Palm Grove, wood engraving 1880.  
Courtesy State Library of Victoria

Right: 'Several striking palms in the Botanic Gardens, Brisbane, 1876', Imperial Photographic Company Views of Brisbane.  
Courtesy State Library of Queensland

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Greg Keighery

## *Dwellers in the mist: mountain bells of the Stirling Ranges*

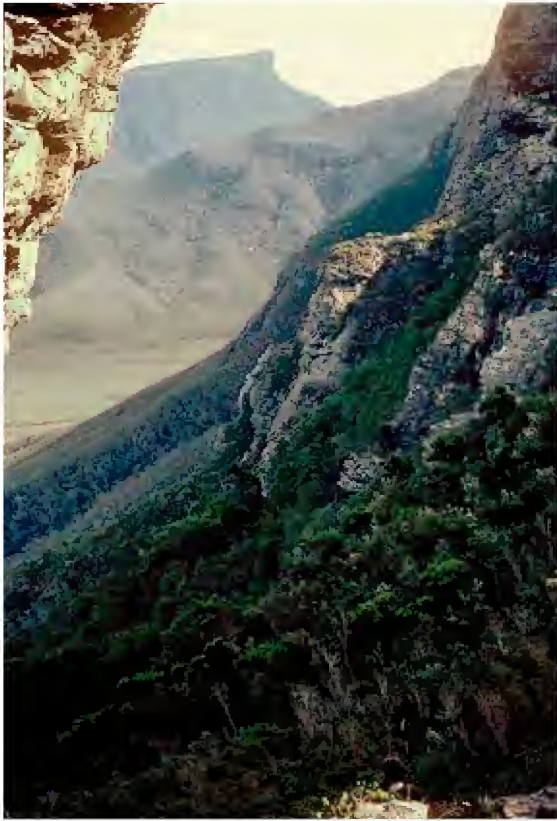
Southwestern Australia is a globally significant biodiversity hotspot for flowering plants. More than 8000 species are known only from this area. Within it, there are particular centres of diversity, such as Western Australia's Fitzgerald River National Park, which has more than 1700 species of plants, and the Stirling Range which has 1500 species, 85 of which are endemic. The mountain bells described here are one well known component of the Stirling Range endemics.

The shrubs we call mountain bells are part of the Australian genus *Darwinia*, which has about 60 species. The genus is named after the physician and naturalist Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802), grandfather of Charles Darwin. Darwinias are in the Myrtaceae family, and are related to the Geraldton waxes (*Chamelaucium*), Albany swamp daisy (*Actinodium*) and the coppercups (*Pileanthus*), all of which occur only in Western Australia (WA), to *Homoranthus* in eastern Australia, and to feather flowers (*Verticordia*), which are Australia-wide. Most of these have colourful flowerheads.

Gillam's bell or scarlet bell, *Darwinia oxylepis*.

Photo: Greg Keighery





Left: Eastern peaks of the Stirling Range. The tallest peak in the distance is Bluff Knoll.

Photo: Greg Keighery



Right: The Stirling Range form of the Cranbrook bell, *Darwinia meeboldii*.

Photo: Greg Keighery

The centre of diversity for *Darwinia* is in southern WA, where there are more than 40 species. The mountain bells are a group of 10 species of *Darwinia*, slender shrubs with compact nodding flowerheads or 'inflorescences' at the ends of the branches, surrounded by large colourful bracts which attract the nectar-feeding birds that pollinate the plants. The nectar is protected by the bracts from dilution from the rain and mist that frequently occur during the flowering season.

Of these ten bell species, nine are called mountain bells and the tenth is the rare Mogumber bell, *Darwinia carnea*. This has greenish-yellow bells and once occurred near Cranbrook, perhaps even in the foothills of the Stirling Range. It is now confined to two small populations at Narrogin (southeast of Perth) and Mogumber (northeast of Perth). All other nine bell-forming species occur only within the Stirling Range National Park.

Mountain bells are killed by fire and regenerate from soil-stored seed, forming large, uniform-aged flowering populations four to seven years after fire. These dense populations can create a stunning vista of blooms. They grow when soils are moist (winter to early summer) and flower in spring (August to November). Plants flower and seed profusely for the first five years after maturity, slowly diminishing in number as the

surrounding vegetation becomes denser, but never entirely vanishing. On the high eastern peaks of the Stirling Range, where the vegetation is often lower, they will remain for over 20 years and often re-seed in open patches. Each of the nine mountain bells occupies a distinct range of a few or a series of peaks, and has its own particular beauty. In general they occur above 300 metres in either mallee heath or Stirling Range thicket.

To 19th century European botanists and horticulturalists,

who first knew of the plants only after 1850, mountain bells were beautiful, exotic and desirable shrubs. However, by the early to mid-20th century they had fallen from favour. The bells were rarely grown and poorly known, both in the wild and cultivation. Like other wildflowers of the Albany area and southern WA in general, mountain bells are highly localised in their distribution and natural habitats. Many of those described below are now becoming rare, and are threatened by human activities.

### Cranbrook bell (*Darwinia meeboldii*)

Found in the lower drier western part of the range, from the Hamilla hills to southwest of Donnelly Peak. First recorded in 1929, it is named after its discoverer, the German botanist Alfred Meebold (1863–1952). A striking species with greenish-white bells tipped red. Although widely grown, most plants in eastern Australia are hybrids with the Mondurup bell or other species.

### Gillam's bell (*Darwinia oxylepis*)

The common name is for Alf Gillam of Cranbrook. This was the first mountain bell recorded by Europeans — it was seen and collected from Red Hill by James Drummond in 1848 and named in 1867 from his collection. (Drummond returned in January 1849 to collect seed, but this does not seem to have been successfully propagated.) It has beautiful scarlet bells.

### Mondurup or tulip bell (*Darwinia macrostegia*)

Found either higher in altitude or on different peaks from the overlapping *D. oxylepis*. A very attractive shrub with flower bracts ranging from white to creamy-green with red veins to fully white or red flowers. Named from material James Drummond collected in 1848; he returned to collect seed in summer 1849. These seeds, like those of the Central Ranges bell, were widely propagated in Britain and Europe, and were flowering profusely by 1855 when several coloured illustrations were produced.

### Wittwers bell (*Darwinia wittwerorum*)

This lovely little bell commemorates horticulturist Ernie Wittwer and botanist Magda Wittwer, associated with Kings Park. The Wittwers loved the flora of the Stirling Range and were with Neville Marchant and me when we collected this species (unfortunately Magda passed away that same night). It occurs on low hills and valleys below Tolls Peak in the central Stirling Range. The flowers are greenish-white at the base, tipped rose pink to red.

### Central Ranges bell (*Darwinia hypericifolia*)

A widespread species on numerous peaks in the central Stirling Range. A more spreading plant than all the previous species, it has slender pure red bells, and was also named from plants James Drummond collected in 1848.

### Pink mountain bell (*Darwinia leiostyla*)

One of the most widespread and variable mountain bells, this has two very separate forms. The form collected by Drummond in 1848 grows in valleys below Bluff Knoll, the other form on the summits of peaks stretching from Ellen Peak in the east to Mount Trio in the west. Bells are a uniform light to deep pink.

### Fringed mountain bell (*Darwinia squarrosa*)

Another species collected by James Drummond in 1848 and the last species of mountain bell he recorded. It is a scrambling plant with small pink bells that are fringed on the margins. This bell is found only on the eastern peaks, chiefly above 500 metres.

### Yellow mountain bell (*Darwinia collina*)

Since he was used to finding only one bell per ascent, Drummond never climbed to the top of Bluff Knoll and missed finding this, my favourite

bell. When in full flower the sight of dozens of low spreading shrubs covered by up to a hundred lemon-yellow bells shining through the morning mist on the Bluff Knoll plateau is a spectacular sight. First collected by botanical artist and writer Emily Pelloe in 1922. This species is found only in areas above 500 metres on the Bluff Knoll plateau.

### Success bell (*Darwinia nubigena*)

The last bell to be recorded and named. I found this species in 1982 on the summit of Mount Success and named it in 2006 (the botanical name means 'dweller in the clouds'). This is its only habitat, and it is the only bell to be confined to a single peak. The plants have small brilliant red bells.

## The future for mountain bells

Among the challenges mountain bells face, one is climate change. Several of the mountain bells occur on the highest peaks of southern Western Australia, where cloud cover is frequent and the temperatures consequently mild and the growing season long. Changes to this climate could increase fire frequency and lengthen time to maturity and soilbank seed replenishment.

However, the major current threat to the bells and the community they occur in is dieback disease (caused by *Phytophthora cinnamomi*), to which they are highly susceptible. Large areas of thicket in the park, especially on the Bluff Knoll plateau, have been lost to this disease and replaced by sedge lands which are not suitable habitat for the bells.

Rabbits have also invaded the high peaks as the community has opened up; they eat the masses of seedlings that occur after fires. Another problem when attempting their conservation is that the bells hybridise readily.

Mountain bells are easily grown from seed or semi-hardwood cuttings, and have been widely but sporadically cultivated in Australia and overseas. They are ideal for large pot culture (even hanging baskets), with judicious pruning often forming spectacular displays. Although they are naturally short-lived, and this is more the case in cultivation, there is still great potential to grow and develop these stunning natives.

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Botanist **Greg Keighery** is a senior principal research scientist with the Western Australian Department of Parks and Wildlife. He has worked at Kings Park and Botanic Garden in Perth. Among his special interests are darwinias and their family, the Myrtaceae.



## AGHS annual general meeting

The 37th annual general meeting of the Australian Garden History Society will be held in Canberra on Saturday 15 October 2016, at 8.30am at the Rex Hotel, 150 Northbourne Ave, Braddon. Items to be included on the agenda should be emailed to the AGHS office ([info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au](mailto:info@gardenhistorysociety.org.au)).

Branches are asked to nominate their representative to the National Management Committee and to inform the Secretary (c/- AGHS office) by 25 August 2016.

There are 2 vacancies for elected positions on the National Management Committee this year.



Photo: Bernadette Hince

Wattle Day has been celebrated on various dates since it began in about 1910. Mid-September was formerly a popular time for Wattle Days, and the day occasionally stretched to a whole 'Wattle Week'. In its earlier days it was a 'button day', on which funds were raised for children's charities by selling cardboard buttons stamped 'Wattle Day for children'.



In NSW Wattle Day used to be on 1 August. Australian state and Federal governments agreed to make a common date of 1 September in 1992. Since then it has been celebrated nationally, although at a modest level.





Trevor Pitkin

## *Unofficial gardening – making history*

My time as an unofficial gardener began around nine years ago, when, having established an 'outer garden' on the nature strip in front of my house and in front of both my neighbours' houses, I looked across the road with heightened interest to a 4-metre deep expanse of kikuyu and some council trees that lay adjacent to a railway for hundreds of metres in both directions. An ambition to create the 'borders' was crystallising.

The local council's staff appeared regularly to mow the grass and dust opposite my house. Thinking that an open and cooperative approach would harness the resources I lacked, I wrote a formal letter outlining my intentions to revegetate

a section of the land, even giving typical plant types. Initially the returning correspondence claimed that the railway operator in fact held responsibility for the subject land, but this was found to be a furphy. The second round from council cited legal reasons (liability for injury due to falling over plants!). The commitment to unofficial gardening on a grander scale was set.

Precedents for planting out nature strips are commonplace enough, and generally not resisted by local governments, but the borders required a tactical approach before I could move ahead. I placed a two-brick high curving 'fence' over which the council ride-on mower would not be inclined to run, taking care to not present it as a barrier as such but merely a side-effect of the layout. This enclosed about ten metres of the strip, and I was able to add new soil and plant it while the ride-on kept its distance.

The unofficial garden in spring 2014.

Photo: Trevor Pitkin





Top: The garden in about 2008, soon after work began on it, showing legacy trees and weedy 'lawn', with new soil in edged beds and some early plantings.

Bottom: A quiet seat, spring 2013.

Photos: Trevor Pitkin

Over a period of four years this tactic of subtle, incremental exclusion of the machine worked well enough to extend the borders for about 50 metres in both directions. The game the mower man and I played was amusing at times, and even satisfying, when he dismounted to manually trim remnant kikuyu that lay within the design. The man on the ground came to accept and nurture what he found by small steps, that coincidentally reduced his overall effort in the process.

Eventually the whole of the borders was kikuyu-free, and then something startling happened. The very resources from council I had imagined could be brought to bear arrived, book-ending my development with new plantings and doing some infilling in places. The whole of the borders was properly mulched for the first time.

The development was effectively sanctioned at that point, though only by action, not decree.

Aside from the council interactions, there have been several other groups to deal with. The railway operator exercised his rights to poison whatever hung over his ballast, and, more, significantly, undertook a severe cut back of legacy trees under which some of the borders plantings were set. I negotiated with council to have the two most affected trees removed, so bad was the work of the 'arborists'. Botanical vandals and thieves have been destructive in other ways, but this has subsided over the last few years, as the planting has changed less, and I have stopped planting the more desirable items there (liliums seem to be targeted in Melbourne). Some old but usable seats and benches have been installed, but later stolen; the current bench is concreted in position.

In the early establishment years I received little support from the locals. One neighbour lent me a copy of the book *The man who planted trees*, a tale by Jean Giono first published in 1953. This I took as a broad recognition of what was happening, and while I needed no spurring on, this gesture stays with me as a very positive statement and accurate capture of my drive.

Once the borders were more advanced and easier to make out, I held several conversations with kindred spirits from across the railway line who could see the potential that lay before them too. Small-scale gardens have arisen accordingly on that side. Several mentioned they had used the seating I had put in, to take in the garden.

I am a highly visible figure both to the locals on walks and to the passengers on the trains that passed by a few metres away from the planting edge. Somehow a few years ago Melbourne's newspaper *The Age* became aware of activities and noted that 'someone in Caulfield' is gardening along the railway verge, as part of a piece on community gardens.

Face-to-face chats about the front garden, outer garden and borders are always enjoyable and show the engagement with the local environment, but there arrived one day a hand written note in my letter box that still lives on the fridge door:

*'Hi! I just wanted to say how much I love your garden/front nature strip. It's a breath of fresh air every time I walk past. So thanks!'*

Unsolicited, unattributed, and priceless.

My story is by no means the only one of this type. It has made me reflect on the contrast between the formal recognition received (in this





journal, for example) by gardens of the state, the wealthy and famous and/or their designers, and the anonymity of those who tread the same path as me. This is really an argument about what is worthy of consideration as historic, perhaps as much in the cultural sense as the purely horticultural. Certainly I make no claims as a landscape or garden designer, but I do claim to have made a positive impact on the local character of the area, and the associated engagement of local people with the gardens.

I am acutely aware that simply telling this story will of itself change nothing for my unofficial garden or anyone else's. If I cease to tend the garden then it will either wither away or eventually be removed or 'simplified' by the council. While there are those around me who would provide some support in my absence, this is not an organised or coherent plan.

Hence I believe the fundamental step is to find a way to positively engage the enduring custodians of the land in question. The current model held by councils generally is that 'odd' is bad or legally challenging, and 'uniform' or 'standard' is good and maintainable; there is little evidence of an ability to accommodate and support the unusual. This is a question of policy as much as process development, and neither is a small task.

It is clearly difficult for others to maintain or manage something which only one person, the originator, can understand. So a basic responsibility of the proponent would be to describe what it is that (educated) third parties need to know to keep the garden thriving. While I do not have this in place for my garden, I can see how it could readily be prepared for an engaged council. Custodians would need to adjust their perspectives and be open to non-standard proposals, and enthusiasts would need to provide some basic descriptive information of their proposal, for the team to have a chance of success.

Finally, I believe there is a place for giving unofficial gardens that arise from the efforts of residents a name, and I do not necessarily mean the name of the resident(s). My sense is that being able to refer to a garden by name is a positive for all concerned, and, over time, will become part of making history in that place.

**Trevor Pitkin** is a systems thinker/engineer with an enduring enthusiasm for plants of most varieties. His increasing focus on the history of gardens is starting to draw him away from new planting and into research. Photography in general, and of botanical subjects in particular, is another enduring enthusiasm.

Mass plantings in the garden, 2014.

Photo: Trevor Pitkin





Don Beer

# *The Australian National Botanic Gardens*

The Australian National Botanic Gardens rockery on a misty morning.

Photo: © Murray Fagg,  
Australian National  
Botanic Gardens  
ANBG R0010143\_2

Walking in the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra is an intensely Australian experience. It is not just that the plants are Australian natives. It is also that the design is informal – and deliberately so. They were planned to provide a ‘natural’ ambience. As such, they have been influential. Along with the Australian Native Plants Society and its earlier incarnations, the Australian National Botanic Gardens have helped define the Australian identity.

These gardens have taught us to appreciate and understand our unique, wonderfully diverse flora. They have encouraged the creation of regional botanic gardens, which usually feature

Australian plants, and, as the national botanic garden, have sought to perform a coordinating role for our botanic gardens in general. They have also provided leadership in such areas as ex situ conservation (the conservation of plants outside areas where they naturally occur). The Gardens have the largest collection of Australian native plant species in the world. This article is about the creation and character of the Gardens, and about their plants.

## **Lindsay Pryor's work**

How such a body came into existence is a curious and complex story. Two people were crucial to it. One was Lindsay Pryor, who became superintendent (later director) of the Parks and Gardens section of the Department of the Interior in 1944 (see *Australian Garden History* vol 27 no 4).



Pryor was young, dynamic and very able. Though trained as a forester, he was very much the scientist. His task was the management of all the public plantings in a rapidly expanding Canberra. Despite the vast range of matters with a claim to his attention, he kept one of them in mind — the stipulation that he develop a botanic garden — and, when circumstances allowed, he acted on it. His philosophy was ‘to get trees in the ground and make ‘em grow’. Refinements like design could come later. So in 1945 the first plantings occurred but they were few in number. Following the departmental decision in 1949 to make a start on the botanic garden, major plantings occurred in 1950 and 1951.

Pryor’s concept of the botanic garden was distinctive. He thought that it should serve the needs of science and education. It was not to be a place for recreation unconnected with botanical study. That meant that he paid little attention to the sweeping lawns, elegant dining and comfortable picnic areas, gracious buildings and paths for fashionable promenading that distinguished the 19th-century botanic gardens of Sydney, Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide. Instead, Pryor favoured a bush ambience, as we have already seen. He also determined the location of the Australian National Botanic Gardens: the area he chose as the most suitable for native plants has become the developed part of the Gardens. Pryor agreed with his predecessors Walter Burley Griffin and Dr BT Dickson that plantings should prioritise but not be confined to natives. In practice, lack of resources caused the planting of exotics to be suspended. The Gardens drifted into being exclusively devoted to Australian native plants but, having done so, made the most of the situation.

## The 1960s

Pryor left Parks and Gardens in February 1959. His achievements more widely in Canberra had been considerable. However, the botanic gardens were then struggling. Years of drought and, even more damaging, excessive rainfall, plus the scarcity of resources, meant that the living collection remained very small — probably no more than a thousand plants — and to many people it was indistinguishable from the surrounding bushland on Black Mountain. Hostile interests were also circling.

The new director of Parks and Gardens was David Shoobridge. Previously Pryor’s deputy, Shoobridge was also trained in forestry. Although

a close friend and admirer of Pryor, he was a very different person, somewhat shy or at least quiet where Pryor had been outgoing. He got along well with virtually everyone. He was more of an administrator than Pryor and more horticultural, which meant that he was less exclusively scientific in outlook than Pryor. Understanding very clearly that the Gardens could not progress without significant popular support, he set out to prepare Pryor’s work for opening to the public.

Preparing the Gardens for the public was much more complicated than it sounds. For a start there was no infrastructure. During the 1950s, for example, the plants were still watered by bucket and there were no buildings of any substance. The boundaries were ill-defined. Many more plants were required. Staffing and staffing structures had to be built almost from scratch and in this respect Shoobridge made two vital appointments, that of Dr ME (Betty) Phillips as botanist in 1960 and John Wrigley as curator in 1967. Phillips developed the most sophisticated record-keeping system in an Australian botanic garden, the central

John Wrigley was appointed curator of the Canberra Botanic Gardens in 1967. He is seen here with a specimen of the wallum teatree, *Leptospermum semibaccatum*.

Photo: Australian Information Service, courtesy Australian National Botanic Gardens ANBG slide 7675/2





feature of which was the matching of each plant in the living collection with a herbarium voucher. Wrigley effectively ran the Gardens, though under Shoobridge's general direction, from his appointment to his resignation in 1981. The early part of that period in particular was formative. Wrigley developed the educational and research sides as well as the horticultural side of the Gardens. Behind these and other initiatives lay the pressing need for money – in large amounts.

For this, Shoobridge fought a long battle and was largely successful. His achievement was to turn the shaky beginnings inherited from Pryor into a national institution, one that was well funded, widely admired and enthusiastically supported at least in some circles. It had the endorsement, however conditional, of nearly all of the prime ministers from 1966 to 1975. The Canberra Botanic Gardens, as they were then called, opened in practice to the public in 1967 and officially in 1970. Shoobridge retired in 1975.

## After Shoobridge

The years after 1975 were ones of increasing difficulty for the Gardens. There were some highlights and some good times. During the 1980s, for example, the Gardens reached a level of maturity previously only imagined. They had their own director, Dr Robert Boden, and were designated the National Botanic Gardens in 1978 and the Australian National Botanic Gardens in 1984. By this time their living collection was

well established. The plantings and design were frequently and highly praised. The education program became more curriculum-based, very effective and one of the Gardens' major functions. Its leadership of ex situ conservation was widely acknowledged. Some international experts ranked the Gardens among the very best of the world's botanic gardens.

However, there were also problems, and these became more serious from 1988 onwards. A number of factors seem to have been involved. One was the savage reduction in government funding of the public service, which required, for example, a 12.5 per cent loss of staff at the Gardens in 1988–89 and frequent further cuts to budget (called 'efficiency dividends') thereafter. These and other economies made no sense at all for a botanic garden. Another factor was the change in values that arose from the growth of environmentalism. In some ways this change helped the Gardens but after they moved into the Environment portfolio in the early 1990s, the impact was strongly negative. Wilderness was prized, and the Australian National Botanic Gardens were not wilderness.

Gardens staff felt that there was not only a lack of funding but also a lack of leadership and even interest in the botanic gardens. Some continue to believe that the position was even worse, that in senior administration there was active hostility towards the Gardens. Whatever the causes, the Gardens suffered.

Proposed site for the Canberra Botanic Gardens, Black Mountain, from the 1935 ministerial report by Dr Bertram Dickson, head of the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry, on the establishment of botanic gardens in Canberra.

Photo: Colin Barnard, ©Australian National Botanic Gardens ANBG s-1603







Left: *Bracteantha* and *Brachyscome* in the Australian National Botanic Gardens rockery.

Photo: ©Murray Fagg 1991, Australian National Botanic Gardens

Right: *Hakea pulvinifera*, a critically endangered plant saved by the conservation program of the Gardens.

Photo: ©Murray Fagg, Australian National Botanic Gardens ANBG a31622

In this respect the Gardens were not alone in the public service and certainly not alone among botanic gardens in Australia or overseas. However, since 2009 there have been signs of improvement. The appointment of a distinguished botanist as executive director, supported by an energetic and able general manager, plus some increase in funding, have been the most obvious indicators. Recently a new master plan laid out directions for development over the next 20 years. Five million dollars has been set aside for the early stages of its implementation. If this money is actually spent on the Gardens and if it prompts further public and/or private funding so that the rest of the master plan can be realised, the Gardens will enter a new era.

## Changing approaches to plantings

This story of the Gardens hints at a major change of direction or development in plantings. The early displays reflected Pryor's botanical orientation: they were taxonomic in nature. If you walk along the main path, you will find a Myrtaceae section followed by the Proteaceae, and later on acacias, and other families and genera.

Beginning in 1969 but already foreshadowed from the time of Pryor, the focus shifted to ecological displays. The first was the spectacular rainforest gully, eventually arranged as a transect running from cool temperate to warm

temperate to subtropical to tropical montane rainforest. The trend to present displays of different ecological regions has continued with the mallee sections, the rockery (each small area has its own local theme), which is among the largest in a botanic garden in the world, the Sydney region gully, and (most recently) the striking Red Centre garden.

Horticultural displays became the third main way of presenting the plants of the Gardens, with beds of attractive native plants next to buildings and in other prominent places. Some of them offered instruction to domestic gardeners in the use of Australian plants. Outside the visitor information centre you can see *Hakea pulvinifera*, an extremely rare plant that highlights yet another Gardens theme, that of conservation. Signs related to the Aboriginal Plant Use walk alert visitors to the ethnobotanical theme. Through all of this change and development, the emphasis on eucalypts, acacias, prostantheras and annuals remained, as did some of the magnificent vistas. If you have the chance to visit them, enjoy!

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**Prof Don Beer** is a volunteer guide at the Australian National Botanic Gardens. He was formerly an associate professor of history at the University of New England, Armidale, NSW.



# Florilegium, Sydney's Painted Garden

Colleen Morris

Almost twenty years ago the Director of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Peter Watts, co-curated a stunning exhibition of works by the great botanical painter Ferdinand Bauer. It was held at the Museum of Sydney in 1997. At the same time the SH Ervin Gallery in Sydney had a show of Dr Shirley Sherwood's collection of contemporary botanical art. Paintings by Australians, among them Melbourne artist Jenny Phillips, were included. As chair of the Sydney and Northern NSW Branch of AGHS, I organised an afternoon talk at the Ervin Gallery with Peter Watts and Shirley Sherwood speaking about the exhibitions. The room was full, and the interest so great that it was almost palpable that a renaissance of botanical art in Australia was about to begin.

The success of these exhibitions inspired Margot Child of the Board of the Friends of the Gardens to commence a yearly fundraising exhibition called Botanica at the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney. These provided encouragement to a growing body of increasingly skilled botanical artists and inspiration for the formation of the Florilegium Society at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney with Beverly Allen as President in 2005. The Florilegium collection created over the ensuing ten years showcases the botanical richness of the living collections of the three Gardens of the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust through the eyes of outstanding botanical artists.

The word 'florilegium', literally a gathering of flowers, was first used in 1590 to describe a publication that focused on the beauty of plants rather than their medicinal value. Florilegia portraying collections of rare and exotic plants flourished from the 17th century to the late 19th century. Modern florilegia seek to record collections of plants from within a particular garden or place.



*Magnolia grandiflora*, bull bay or southern magnolia, a native of southeastern USA, is prominent throughout the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney and in old, very large Sydney gardens. This species was probably introduced to NSW by William Macarthur of Camden Park, from whom the Colonial Secretary of the colony, Alexander Macleay, acquired a plant for his garden at Elizabeth Bay in 1836.

P 61, *The Florilegium* (details on p 30)  
Artist: Jenny Phillips, 2015



The artists have gifted their paintings to the Trust in celebration of the bicentenary of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney in 2016.

The book *The Florilegium: the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney celebrating 200 years*, was recently released. The exhibition on display at the Museum of Sydney from July until October 2016 displays the vibrant and detailed works of 64 Australian and international artists. Their paintings illustrate the diversity of plants grown by the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust. Like the book, the exhibition is about living history – for 200 years the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney has provided impetus to the botanical and horticultural life of Sydney and New South Wales. This story will be told through 87 paintings of significant plants, displayed together for the first time.

There are many ways of appreciating the paintings and the plants. The book presents the works chronologically according to the date of introduction of each species to the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney and its associated Blue Mountains Garden, Mt Tomah and the Australian Garden, Mt Annan.

The exhibition has provided an opportunity for an alternative way of arranging the paintings, vividly demonstrating how important the Sydney Botanic Garden was for plant introductions, and how its staff influenced trends in planting preferences and garden styles. As early as the 1820s, for example, Superintendent Charles Fraser began planting trees from northern NSW and Moreton Bay (Queensland), a practice continued by

later superintendents and directors. Gradually gardeners in Sydney developed a taste for rainforest trees and subtropical plants, even before 1910 when Director J H Maiden stated he would like Sydney ‘to present a more semi-tropical aspect’ and began a widespread planting of palms.

One of the earliest trees planted in the Royal Botanic Garden was the then prized Norfolk Island Pine, *Araucaria heterophylla*, a species now ubiquitous on coastal headlands around Australia. Governor Macquarie had a specimen planted at the ‘intended grand entrance’ to the new botanic garden in 1814 and *Araucaria heterophylla* is strongly linked to the history and visual character of the Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney.

The exhibition includes a film of artist Angela Lober painting this species. The film was expressly commissioned for the exhibition to demonstrate the exacting process of the practice of botanical art, and it will be displayed alongside the completed painting.

For lovers of botanical art there will be two exhibitions at the Museum of Sydney – *Florilegium*, Sydney’s Painted Garden (Saturday 30 July to Sunday 30 October 2016) and (from Saturday 13 August 2016) *The Artist and the Botanical Collector*.

**Colleen Morris** is a longstanding member and former chair of the Australian Garden History Society. This article features illustrations from Colleen’s newest book, *The Florilegium: the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney celebrating 200 years*, with Louisa Murray (Florilegium Society at the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, 2016).



*Diploglottis campbellii*, small-leaved tamarind, a rare rainforest tree native to northern NSW and southern Queensland, was well known to 19th century settlers, but for many years it escaped the notice of botanical collectors. William Bäuerlen collected it in 1892 but it was not botanically described until 1923. The artist is particularly interested in rainforest species that she has propagated and has growing on her own property in northern NSW. She typically depicts the forest floor beneath her chosen subject.

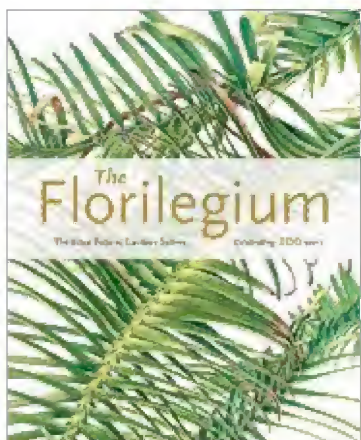
P 121, *The Florilegium* (details on p 30)  
Artist: Colleen Werner; 2008



# For the bookshelf

Colleen Morris and Louisa Murray (2016)  
*The Florilegium: the Royal Botanic Gardens  
Sydney celebrating 200 years*

Florilegium Society at the Royal Botanic Gardens  
Sydney, Hunters Hill NSW, hardback, 224 pp,  
hardcover \$90, softcover \$65



Dr Shirley Sherwood OBE, Patron of the Florilegium Society, can be very proud of her antipodean offspring. I have known of her work for many years as a collector and inspiration/motivator for modern approaches to botanical art through exhibitions, commissions, the gallery at Kew, and wonderful books such as her collaboration with Dr John Kress of the Smithsonian on the truly superb *The art of plant evolution*.

Now, to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, we have this splendid publication put together by the Florilegium Society of that body. We (AGHS members) should all celebrate because our own organisation invested in the project through the Kindred Spirits Fund and donations from several branches and many members.

Though it had an earlier meaning, ‘florilegium’ has generally been used over the last few hundred years to mean ‘a collection of paintings of a particular garden or place’. Many of us remember the thrill of finally seeing Banks’ *Florilegium* in the 1980s, some 200 years after Sydney Parkinson’s drawings had been prepared.

In 1998 the Shirley Sherwood *Collection of Botanical Art* was shown at the SH Ervin Gallery in Sydney. It coincided with an astonishing historical collection of Ferdinand Bauer’s work, curated by Peter Watts and Jo Anne Pomfrett at the Museum of Sydney. Well known botanical artist Beverly Allen, working with Margot Child, curator of the first *Botanica*, then set out to establish the Florilegium Society, and here we have its product.

With an excellent historical introduction from Colleen Morris and high quality scientific entries by Louisa Murray, the works of Australian and overseas artists are beautifully reproduced. They present in their diversity the full range of approaches to modern botanical art. The paintings represent not only Australian plants but the diverse collections of all three of the Royal Botanic Gardens – in Sydney, Mt Tomah and Mt Annan.

From July to October the Museum of Sydney will show the works of this book in an exhibition curated by Colleen Morris (see pages 28–29, this issue).

Australians have been very well served over recent decades by an extraordinary diversity of books showcasing botanical illustration in all its diversity. From Helen Hewson’s publication in 1999 of *300 years of botanical illustration* and the collective works of Richard Aitken to the 2004 *Herbarium* by Robyn Stacey and Ashley Hay, and the wonderful doorstopper from the Art Gallery of Ballarat in 2012, *Capturing Flora*.

Now *The Florilegium* comes to us. We should be grateful, and rush to buy a copy.

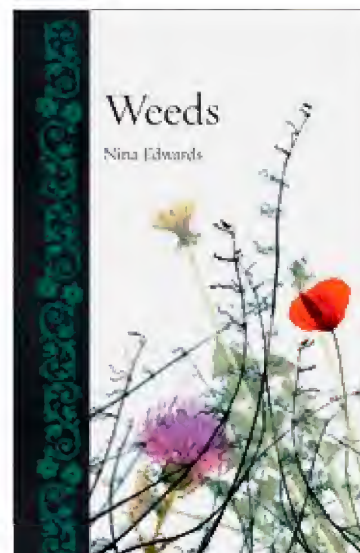
**Max Bourke AM** is a former deputy chair of AGHS with extensive heritage and arts experience.

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Nina Edwards (2015) *Weeds*

Reaktion Books, London, hardback, 224 pp,  
\$39.99

*Weeds* is an attractive, optimistic and – perhaps appropriately for the topic – at times a rambling journey through past, present and future ideas of weeds. Weeds did not exist before there were people – they are a human construct, and this construct has changed dramatically through the course of human history. While the need to weed intensively cultivated gardens and fields remains, many other



ideas of weeds have come and gone. Some plants are weeds in one place but not others: ‘Burdock is a weed in the field, but a prized plant in the border’ (p 29). Weeds have been incredibly important and useful as medicines, poisons and food. They have been used as symbols of corruption, disorder, and ‘moral foulness’ (p 96) and have been popularised as man-eaters (Audrey in ‘Little Shop of Horrors’) and as monsters (‘The Day of the Triffids’). While the book has an English voice there are enough examples from Australia and around the world to interest most readers. The well-known story of *Echium*



*plantagineum* is recounted, being known as Salvation Jane (a useful fodder plant in times of drought South Australia) and as Patterson's Curse (a noxious weed) through the rest of Australia.

*Weeds* is at its strongest when trawling through history to relate the many personalities of weeds. These include bringing pleasure through art. Constance Spry brought floristry to the masses by incorporating common weeds into her arrangements, and weeds are a common feature of Shakespeare's sonnets and Caravaggio's paintings. (For those who haven't seen Karl Blossfeldt's early 20th century photographs of plant parts, these are mesmerising). They also thrive after war, flourishing after the devastation of Hiroshima and at Flanders.

*Weeds* shows us that weeds have been a more important part of human history than I had realised. And perhaps more importantly, that weeds are likely to be a more important part of our future. While we have been through a period of industrial weed control through the use of chemicals, helicopters and robots, we are increasingly turning to more organic methods of gardening, harvesting wild foods, and herbal remedies, that allow or even encourage weeds to persist. Our future urban landscapes may look more like New York's High Line than Versailles.

**Dr Dave Kendal** is broadly interested in the connections between people, 'nature' and its management.

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**Carolyn Landon (2015) *Banksia lady*, Celia Rosser**

**Monash University Publishing, Melbourne, paperback, 241 pp**

This well written and researched book is the story of Celia Rosser's rise to fame as one of the world's most talented botanical artists. After meeting Rosser at her house in Fish Creek, Gippsland, Carolyn realised that she was interviewing an artist of rare talent. She spent the next 18 months collecting stories from the artist and from her many colleagues and friends.

Born in 1930 during the Great Depression, Rosser struggled to become an artist in her own right, overriding society's predominant view of a woman's role as something confined to marriage and motherhood. She started her working life in the graphics world but after moving to Monash



University, her talent for drawing and painting was recognised. In 1972 the Monash Banksia Project was launched, and Celia was appointed as artist, with Alex George as author.

Despite worries over funding, the next 25 years brought field trips, patient accurate drawings, much discussion and, finally, worldwide recognition. The work brought contact with botanists and collectors of botanical art, including William Stearn and Wilfrid Blunt, and a meeting with HM Queen Elizabeth II.

After producing 76 paintings of all known species of *Banksia*, which were published in a three-part monograph, a further banksia was discovered. In one of the proudest moments of her life, this was named *Banksia rosserae*. In March 2000 she received an honorary doctorate – Doctor of Law, *honoris causa*. The citation read: 'Dr Rosser's outstanding achievement has rightly brought her recognition as one of the great botanical artists, not only of Australia in the 20th century but of any age and country'.

**Penny Price** is a Cambridge-based botanical artist whose work features in the new *Florilegium*.



# AGHS news

## Australian Garden History to go digital

The Australian Garden History Society is excited to be negotiating online digital access to this journal, *Australian Garden History*, through Biodiversity Heritage Library. This will see *Australian Garden History* reach a greater audience to promote the Society and our mission.

## Insects rule ok

ACT member **Marie Wood** reports that 30 fortunate members from AGHS's ACT, Monaro and Riverina branch had a stimulating visit to two national institutions in February 2016, CSIRO's Australian National Insect Collection and its Atlas of Living Australia.



Photo: Marie Wood

The Australian National Insect Collection in Canberra manages the largest collection of Australian insects in the world. After being briefed on the history and purpose of the collection, senior technician Alan Langford showed members several of the repositories. They also investigated Australian native bees,

following up on the interest created by a wonderful lecture on native bees at the Adelaide national conference in October 2015. It was a great privilege to be able to explore the collection, as CSIRO is no longer able to provide public tours. Tour members were overwhelmed by the depth, scope, and beauty of this national collection of insects.

Atlas of Living Australia director Dr John de la Salle then talked about this website, which presents data about all aspects of Australia's natural systems – plants, animals, birds, insects – in breathtaking detail.

For further information about these institutions, see [www.csiro.au/en/Research/Collections/ANIC](http://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Collections/ANIC) and [www.ala.org.au](http://www.ala.org.au).

## Farewell Ailsa McPherson

We note with sadness the death of long-time AGHS member Ailsa McPherson (b 30 July 1936), who died on 7 March 2016. Ailsa's diverse interests included history, heritage and theatre, as well as gardens and gardening. She contributed the chapter 'Exhibiting gardening' to *Gardens of history and imagination: growing New South Wales*, published in June 2016 by Sydney University Press with the support of AGHS.



The War Memorial and King George Sound, Albany.  
Photo courtesy City of Albany

## 2014 WA annual conference papers

In 2014 the Western Australian branch of the Australian Garden History Society held the 35th Annual National Conference in Albany, WA, over three days in October. A selection of eminent professionals spoke at the conference on topics varying from the geomorphology and ecology to the history of the landscape and gardens of the Great Southern Region. Selected papers are now available at [www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au](http://www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au).

## More news on the Heritage Rose Garden at Saumarez, Armidale NSW

The Heritage Rose Garden at Saumarez homestead, Armidale, has received a Conservation Collection Award at the 2016 National Trust Awards.

The judges noted that as a result of the work of dedicated and tireless volunteers and the Northern NSW sub-branch of AGHS, the garden preserves a living collection of heritage roses. Hundreds of roses formerly in the garden of Miss Catherine MacLean now form the basis of a garden of some 600 roses, representing over 24 distinct cultivar groups in 44 formal beds. AGHS's Northern NSW sub-branch has some 70 members who started from the ground up, designing beds, digging the ground, and planting roses to create the heritage rose garden.



# Exhibitions

Florilegium: Sydney's Painted Garden – 30 July to 30 October 2016

The Artist and the Botanical Collector – 13 August to 20 November 2016

Two botanical art exhibitions open soon at the Museum of Sydney (corner of Bridge and Phillip Sts, Sydney)

See this issue pp 28–29, or [sydneylivingmuseums.com.au](http://sydneylivingmuseums.com.au).

## Ways of turning 200

Many events this year in the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Garden.

Among them is the exhibition *barrangal dyara (skin and bones)* (17 September – 3 October 2016), the work of Sydney artist Jonathan Jones, who plans to install thousands of ceramic shields in the southwestern corner of the Garden. Here an Italianate exhibition building, the huge 'Garden Palace' (very much like the slightly later Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne), designed by colonial architect James Barnet of American origin was built in 1879. A fire in 1882 destroyed the building and its historical records, Aboriginal artefacts and other valuable collections.

# Dialogue



Dramatic flowering stems of *Anigozanthos* 'Bush Tango' photographed in 2007 at the entry to the Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Cranbourne Gardens.

Photo: Rodger Elliott

## Kangaroo paws at Cranbourne in November

In November 2016 there will be a month-long celebration of kangaroo paws at Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, Cranbourne. The Australian Garden will feature an abundance of displays of these distinctive and colourful Australian plants. Celebrations include a three-day symposium covering aspects of the science and cultivation of plants in the kangaroo paw family (Haemodoraceae), on 24–26 November 2016. Speakers at the symposium will include Stephen Hopper (a world authority on the Haemodoraceae), Kingsley Dixon (Curtin University of Technology, WA, and former long-term leader of research at Kings Park, WA), leading kangaroo paw breeder Angus Stewart, and Kings Park plant breeder Digby Grown.

## Gardens and health

A report on the impact of gardens and gardening on health and wellbeing has been released by the UK King's Fund. It was commissioned by the UK's National Gardens Scheme in 2015, and explores what health and social care systems can do to maximise the health benefits of gardens and gardening. *Gardens and health: implications for policy and practice* is written by David Buck and is available at [www.ngs.org.uk/Upload/What-we-do/News/King's%20Fund%20Report%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.ngs.org.uk/Upload/What-we-do/News/King's%20Fund%20Report%20FINAL.pdf).



# Diary dates

For further details on events, please see the AGHS website or contact the relevant branch.

## Queensland

**Sunday 10 July 2016**

**Self-drive tour of Maleny and Montville gardens**

10am departure for Fairview in North Maleny, The Shambles in Montville. Details Margie Barram [margieaghsq@gmail.com](mailto:margieaghsq@gmail.com).

**Wednesday 10 August 2016**

**Royal Queensland Show People's Day**

AGHS Queensland branch stand, Flower and Horticultural area, Exhibition Hall – displays on Old Museum gardens and the bush house.

**Late August 2016 (Sunday PM date tba)**  
**Annual lecture and AGM**

**September 2016 (date tba)**

**2016 suburban walk, Glen Lyon Estate**

Tour the first 'garden estate' subdivision in Queensland' with Ashgrove resident and historian Dr Thom Blake as guide.

## ACT/Monaro/Riverina

**Thursday 14 July 2016**

**Dr Greg Johnson 'Write on gardening in Australia 1939 to 1988 – the times they are a changin'.'**

5.30 for 5.45pm lecture start, Menzies Room, National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes ACT. Members \$10, non-members \$15, incl refreshments. Bookings Helen Elliot 02 6284 4749, [ellieth@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ellieth@bigpond.net.au).

**Thursday 25 August 2016**

**ACT/MONARO/RIVERINA branch AGM and annual lecture**

5pm AGM, Menzies Room, National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes, followed by

**Leonie Norton 'Marriane Collinson Campbell: 'A privileged life', 1827–1903**

5.30 for 5.45pm lecture start, Menzies Room, National Archives of Australia, Queen Victoria Terrace, Parkes ACT. Members \$10, non-members \$15, incl refreshments. Bookings Helen Elliot 02 6284 4749, [ellieth@bigpond.net.au](mailto:ellieth@bigpond.net.au).

## South Australia

**July 2016 (date tba)**

**Talk by Steve Hailstone 'Great Dixter and European gardens'**

**Sunday 21 August 2016**

**SA branch AGM**

Carrick Hill, lunch and speaker (details tba on website).

**September 2016 (date tba)**

**Day trip to Pottaloch Station and Pangarinda Arboretum**

## Sydney and Northern NSW

Bookings and enquiries for all events Jeanne Villani [Jeanne@Villani.com](mailto:Jeanne@Villani.com). Please book before paying as events may be booked out.

**Saturday 23 July 2016**

**Guided walk of Female Factory, Parramatta North, with Gay Hendriksen**

2–4.30pm, meeting place tba. Members \$20, guests \$25, incl light refreshments, bookings essential.

**14 August 2016**

**Botanical Art at the Museum of Sydney 'Florilegium – Sydney's Painted Garden' exhibition talk with curator Colleen Morris and Florilegium Society president Beverly Allen (details tba)**

View this exhibition and 'The Artist and the Botanical Collector' (details tba). Museum of Sydney, cnr Phillip and Bridge Sts, Sydney.

**Wednesday 17 August 2016**

**Sydney and Northern NSW branch AGM and Tim Entwistle talk 'Shared dreams and destiny – botanic gardens of Melbourne and Sydney'**  
6pm for 7–8.30pm, Annie Wyatt Room, National Trust Centre, Observatory Hill. Members \$20, guests \$30, incl light refreshments, bookings essential.

**Saturday 3 September 2016**

**AGHS members-only preview of 'Planting Dreams: Shaping Australia Gardens'**

11am Talk by curator Richard Aitken, former editor of Australian Garden History, at the exhibition (3 September 2016 – 15 January 2017), State Library of NSW.

## Tasmania

**Sunday 24 July 2016**

**Tasmanian branch AGM and Dot Evans lecture, 'The land, the ability, the power and the purse'**

2pm, Phillip Smith Building, Edward Street, Glebe, Hobart. Enquiries Dot and Mike Evans, [wilmotarms@bigpond.com](mailto:wilmotarms@bigpond.com).

**Sunday 18 September 2016**

**Lecture by Dr Greg Moore 'Saving urban trees'**

2pm, Runnymede, 81 Bay Rd, New Town (details tba on website).

## Southern Highlands

**Sunday 21 August 2016**

**Winter seminar on Paul Sorensen in the Southern Highlands, and Southern Highlands branch AGM**

10.30am – 3pm, talks by Stuart Read and James Hoskins, East Bowral Committee Centre.

**Saturday 17 September 2016**

**Coach trip to Sydney exhibitions**

Coach trip to Museum of Sydney (exhibition Florilegium: Sydney's Painted Garden), lunch at Royal Botanic Gardens, visit to the new attraction The Calyx, followed by State Library of New South Wales (Planting Dreams: Shaping Australian Gardens).

## Victoria

**Saturday 16 July 2016**

**'Belmont', Beaufort working bee**

10am, members only, details Fran Faul 03 9853 1369, [franfaul@gmail.com](mailto:franfaul@gmail.com).

**Wednesday August 8**

**Branch AGM and lecture NSW Land and Environment Court Commissioner Judy Fakes 'Trees and neighbours'**

6pm refreshments 6.30pm AGM, 6.40pm lecture, The Herbarium, Birdwood Ave, Royal Botanic Gardens. Bookings [www.trybooking.com/KZZM](http://www.trybooking.com/KZZM), phone bookings/enquiries Lisa Tuck 0418 590 891, [lisatuck1@bigpond.com](mailto:lisatuck1@bigpond.com).

**Saturday 17 – Sunday 18 September 2016**

**Weekend working bee 'Turkeith' and 'Mooleric'**

Details Fran Faul 03 9853 1369, [franfaul@gmail.com](mailto:franfaul@gmail.com).

## Western Australia

**Sunday 14 August 2016**

**WA branch AGM**

2–4.30pm, Grove Library Community Room. Julian Donaldson will speak on his new role as CEO of National Trust (WA).

**Sunday 28 August 2016**

**Woodbridge House**

Joint event with the Woodbridge Education and Learning team (see website for details). RSVP Sue Monger 0417 187 376, [susanmonger@yahoo.com.au](mailto:susanmonger@yahoo.com.au).



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*Australian Garden History* welcomes contributions of any length up to 1200 words. Prospective contributors are strongly advised to contact the editor before submitting text or images.

The views expressed in this journal are those of the contributors and are not necessarily shared by the Australian Garden History Society.



# AGHS autumn garden tour 2016

Anne Vale

As the coach left the Melbourne Arts Centre in April 2016, the clouds darkened and raindrops spattered on the windscreen, increasing to a deluge as we progressed towards northeastern Victoria. But as intrepid gardeners and obsessive garden visitors, we refused to be daunted!

Our first stop was The Falls in Longwood, a working farm and country homestead at the foot of a spectacular granite ridgeline which forms part of the Strathbogie Ranges. Many of the trees here were resplendent with autumn colour, including the maidenhair tree *Ginkgo biloba*, Chinese elm *Ulmus parvifolia*, macadamia and avocado groves.

At Benalla Botanic Garden (listed on the Register of the National Estate in 1995) there was a torrent of rain as we arrived. John Hawker led a small group of stalwarts on a quick tour of the most interesting trees in the garden, which contains a number of rare and mature plants including three *Ulmus viminalis*, a large crow's ash *Flindersia australis*, and two magnificent specimens of *Eucalyptus leucoxylon*. John has had a long association with this garden and was involved in the planting plan for the New Zealand bed, planted in 2002 and designed to complement the modernist architecture of the nearby gallery.

Our next stop was Plane Trees in Stanley, set within five acres of garden. This garden's colours included the Chinese quince *Pseudocydonia sinensis* and *Crataegus* haws which glowed jewel-like through the raindrops.

In Beechworth we stayed at Linaker Hotel, which is surrounded by the 27 acres of Mayday Hills, planted in the late 19th century with exotic trees and shrubs donated by the Royal Botanical Gardens in Melbourne. Over 200 trees are now National Trust listed. Our first evening's pre dinner drinks were at Wallasey-Beaumaris, a historic cottage with one of the first gardens to have opened in the Open Garden Scheme (1988–89). It has not been open for 25 years so we felt very fortunate.

Our next stop was Yackandandah. Gundowring Homestead, the oldest homestead and garden we visited here, was settled in the 1840s. Some of the elms, poplars and an enormous mulberry tree from the original plantings still remain. Our final garden for

the day, Offhand Manor, was a contemporary landscape surrounding a very modern single story dwelling.

On our last day we toured the Beechworth cemetery, begun in 1856 and described by John Hawker as one of 'the most beautifully landscaped and treed cemeteries in Victoria'. At Jacks Creek, home of Ali Garnett (daughter of Tom and Penny Garnett) and family, stone steps guided us through terraced garden beds of drought tolerant shrubs, trees and perennials. As we headed back towards Melbourne, our final garden was award-winning Sunnymede at Kithbrook. This extensive formal garden of interconnecting rooms has deep perennial borders, lovely stone structures, a lawn area enclosed by hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), a Persian-style garden with a central raised pond and pavilion, and a yellow garden.

AGHS member and garden historian **Dr Anne Vale** is currently writing *Influential Australian garden people: their stories*, the sequel to *Exceptional Australian Garden Makers* (2014).



Above: *Crataegus* haws in the autumn rain. Photo: Anne Vale 2016  
Banner: Sunnymede's topiary. Photo: Anne Vale 2016



The Australian Garden History Society promotes awareness and conservation of significant gardens and cultural landscapes through engagement, research, advocacy and activities.